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## ABSTRACT

Research for Better Schools, Inc., a regional educational laboratory, is proceeding to develop an employer-based career education model in order to provide further definition and meaning to the concept. The model will be a private academic school, the Academy for Career Education, and will serve 100 11th grade students from Philadelphia. It will involve major elements of management, instruction, guidance and counseling, and evaluation; the central model element will be the instructional program, with more than half of the instruction to be conducted by employers. Presently 33 employers have been committed to participate in the program. Instructional activities will be included under three major educational themes: (1) general education (basic skills, core curriculum, and electives); (2) explorative education (career and life skills); (3) specialized education (career and life skills). The preliminary model version is now operational at the Philadelphia site. Employer-based career education, an experiment to determine employer willingness and ability to contribute to education, involves intensive study and active participation in the world of work as well as employer participation in determining educational policy and providing instruction. (A discussion of nine current propositions related to employer-based career education is included in the paper.) (EA)

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## EMPLOYER-BASED CAREER EDUCATION:

## THE RBS MODEL

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## EMPLOYER-BASED CAREER EDUCATION: THE RBS MODEL

Research for Better Schools, Inc. (RBS) is one of the regional educational laboratories created under Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It is presently developing an employer-based career education model. Three other laboratories are charged with the same responsibility. They are the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

### Introduction

Employer-based career education is a concept in search of definition. Conflicting perceptions of the concept are scattered throughout the literature and very different kinds of models are under development in laboratories across the country. Even the operational programs of the various models are constantly changing as new resources are uncovered and new approaches discovered. There are no established policies, no fixed programs, no concrete procedures. In short, there are no tenets of employer-based career education. This situation is not necessarily bad and may in fact produce constructive results.

Given the ambiguity surrounding the concept, career education should be treated as a high risk, experimental venture. The demand for career education is leading schools to buy a career education approach with little understanding of what the concept implies or how to go about implementing a program. If premature definitions and preliminary programs

are accepted, career education may well become another educational concept which apparently was "tried and failed" when in fact it was never really tried. Career education programs must be carefully defined, implemented and evaluated so that sound results and products can be disseminated over time.

Perhaps the only way to supply a meaningful definition of the still elusive concept is through long-term operational experience. In other words, the concept becomes defined by what is actually done and the results which are obtained in trying to operationalize a program. Model development in this instance follows a cycle of activities which begins with the design of a preliminary program, moves quickly to develop an operational prototype, provides for continuous evaluation of the program in a live setting, and uses the results as a basis for redesigning the program. The RBS version of an employer-based model is moving in this direction.

At this point, the RBS model is in the operational prototype stage. A preliminary program has been designed and is currently being implemented in a live setting in Philadelphia. The remainder of this paper is a report on the RBS experience with the model to date. Some background information on the development of the model is provided; the nature of the prototype program is outlined; and some propositions about the purpose and meaning of employer-based career education are presented.

Historical Background

RBS has been involved with the employer-based career education model since June of 1971. At that time, the United States Office of Education (USOE) contracted with RBS for the performance of a feasibility study of the employer-based career education model concept. The feasibility study was to cover the following nine (9) areas:

1. Curriculum
2. Evaluation Component
3. Cost Analyses and Payment Systems
4. Consortia Organization/Management
5. Instructional Program Staff
6. Guidance and Pupil Services
7. Legal Issues
8. Program Entrance and Exit Criteria
9. Synthesis of Eight Studies

During the summer of 1971, RBS began to organize and conduct the feasibility study. Around October, 1971, USOE asked RBS to change its posture. Instead of doing feasibility studies, RBS was asked to establish an operational employer-based model. RBS accepted this new challenge and submitted to USOE a two-volume report, portraying the preliminary findings of its feasibility study. The submission of the report ended RBS' feasibility study phase.

From October through December 31, 1971, detailed plans for the establishment of an operational model were developed. The planning was based upon the following major assumptions:

1. RBS would form an independent corporation to be responsible for the operational model.
2. OE would directly fund the new corporation, and RBS would assume a technical assistance role.
3. The operational model would be a tri-state one, drawing students and resources from Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), Camden (New Jersey), and Wilmington (Delaware).
4. Two-hundred (200) students, ages 15 to 18, would be included in the program.

In early January of 1972, RBS submitted to USOE a detailed operational plan which was based on the above assumptions, and began to perform the relevant tasks. For example, state education agencies and local school districts were contacted, and RBS proceeded to contact employers and community leaders for the purpose of establishing the new corporation. A meeting of the incorporators of the new corporation, the Academy for Career Education, was held, and the articles of incorporation were signed. The Academy for Career Education was chartered as a private, non-profit corporation in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

In February, 1972, RBS was notified by USOE that a tri-state program was not then feasible; that RBS, not OE, was to be responsible for the operational funding of the Academy; and that insufficient funds existed to cover the costs as projected by RBS.

In analyzing the implications of this notice, RBS, in conjunction with the incorporators of the Academy, decided

to reevaluate the approach to the projected effort. Major outcomes of the reevaluation were:

1. The need for a closer, more continuous and greater connection between RBS and the Academy.
2. The need for internal reorganization of RBS' effort.
3. Delimitation of the initial effort to one-hundred (100) eleventh grade students, ages 16 and 17, from Philadelphia.

The approach to developing and testing an employer-based model was then separated into two components: Program Development and Program Operations. Both of these components placed primary attention on the following activities which had as their target the implementation of an operational program by October 2, 1972: (1) designing and developing the instructional program and guidance system; (2) recruiting, screening and selecting of students; (3) negotiating and planning with employers for participation in the program; and (4) orienting program participants.

Significant progress has been made in all of these areas since that time. Instructional and guidance programs were designed and are being implemented. (A description of the instructional program is contained in the next section.) Employer contacts have advanced to the point that RBS had secured the commitment of thirty-three (33) employers to participate in the program. About thirty (30) hours of face-to-face discussions were included in planning a program with each employer. One-hundred (100) students who represent a cross section of the student population in Philadelphia were

recruited and selected. The Academy officially opened on September 19, 1972 with a seven-day student orientation program. On September 28, 1972, the instructional program began.

In summary, RBS is proceeding to develop and test an employer-based career education model, called the Academy for Career Education. The Academy is a private, non-profit corporation. It is also licensed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a private, academic school. The Academy has its own Board of Directors who serve as the policy-making body for the operational program.

#### An Overview of the RBS Model

The model of employer-based career education involves four major elements: a management structure, an instructional program, guidance and counseling activities, and an evaluation plan. The central element of the model is the instructional program since the nature of the instructional activities strongly influence the governance and management of the institution, the nature of the student personnel services, and the shape of the evaluation. To a large extent, the instructional program defines the model.

A preliminary version of the RBS instructional program is now being implemented in the Academy for Career Education. The Academy offers a full year program which is divided into four three-month quarters. More than half of the instruction is conducted by employers. Chart 1 shows the various instructional activities included in the program under three major educational themes.

# RBS EMPLOYER BASED MODEL

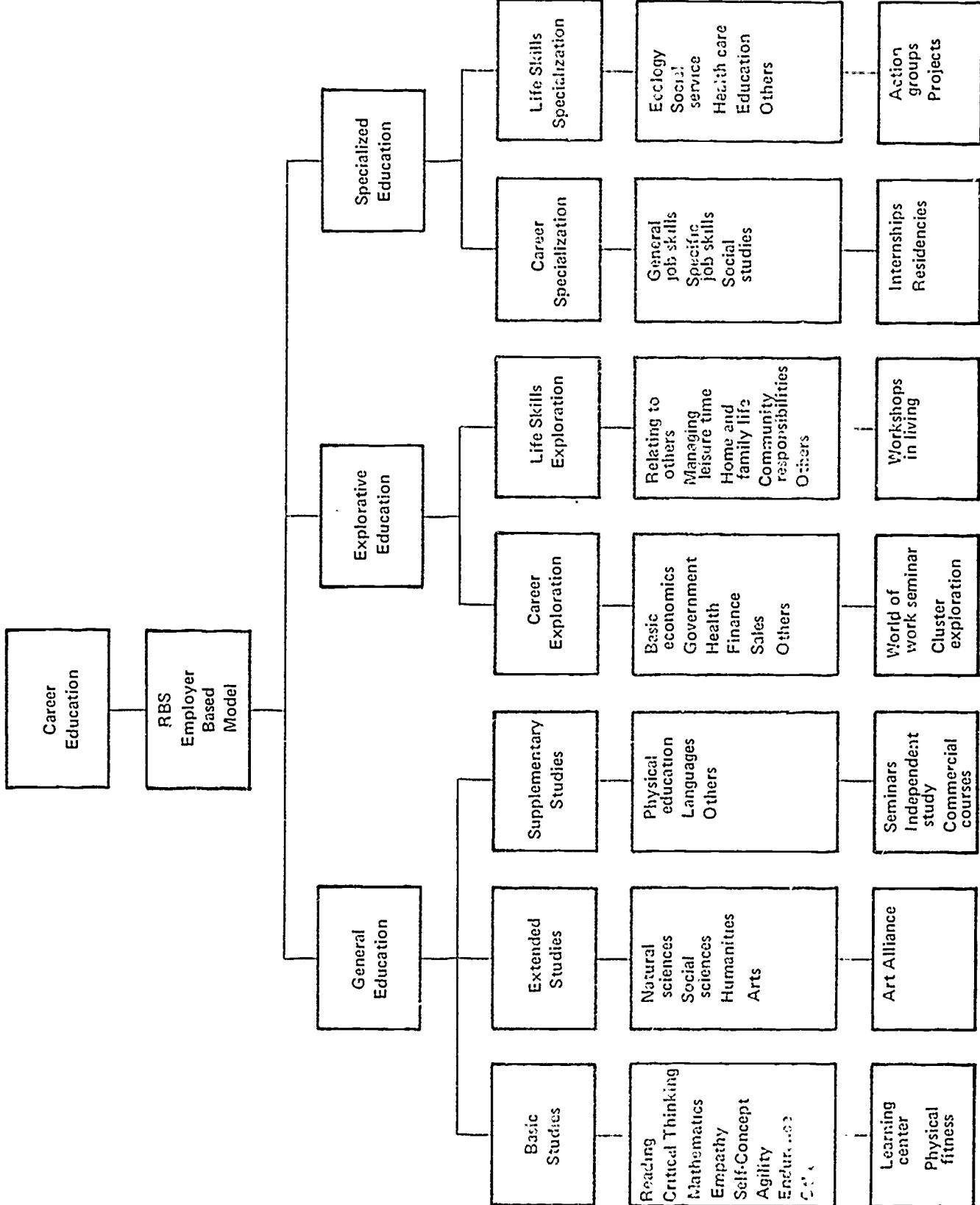
OVERALL  
MISSION:

BASIC  
MODEL:

EDUCATIONAL  
THEMES:  
PROGRAM  
COMPONENTS:  
INSTRUCTIONAL  
CONTENT:

9

CURRENT  
COURSE  
OFFERINGS:



General education. The content areas commonly associated with a secondary school educational experience fall in this category. The instructional content has been subdivided into three components.

basic Studies provide the cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills which all students need to master the instructional program of the Academy and to function effectively in later life. Minimum performance standards have been defined for many of these skills and every student has been measured against these criterion-referenced standards. The cognitive area includes skills in communication arts, mathematics, listening and thinking; the affective area involves basic skills in intra- or inter-personal behavior; and the psychomotor area addresses perceptual, motor and physical skills.

Students who need to develop their cognitive or affective skills are provided a highly individualized learning program in a learning center housed at the central facility. A physical fitness program is prepared with each student depending on his needs and interests. It may be conducted at a variety of locations throughout the city using facilities available at YMCA's, universities, and neighborhood recreational centers.

Extended Studies involve the "core" curriculum content in the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. An instructional program in the Arts has been developed in cooperation with the Art Alliance, a professional association of artists in the city. It provides a series of

lectures and demonstrations in the major fields of art (e.g., sculpture, drawing) for all students. This required portion of the program is followed by individual and small group work with professional artists in the area of student choice. Additional programs in science, mathematics and social studies will be developed in conjunction with professional associations and individual employers.

Supplementary studies include an extensive variety of optional courses which are tailored to individual needs and interests. Different approaches were used to provide a full range of optional courses for student choice. The participating employers were surveyed to enlist the cooperation of qualified staff members in teaching small group seminars. Over fifty different seminars, ranging from Korean to Karate, were offered to students from this source alone. Each student was also given a one hundred and fifty dollar allowance which can be used to pay tuition fees for approved training programs offered by commercial institutions in the city. Additional courses were made available through a comprehensive independent study program using a variety of curriculum guides such as the United States Air Force Institute (USAF) materials, computerized courses developed by the School District of Philadelphia, and published materials.

Exploratory Education. The purpose of explorative education is to provide a wide angle view of the world of work and a series of life situations. These learning experiences can be distinguished from the more academic learning

activities found in General Education on the one hand and the more narrowly focused work involvement of Specialized Education on the other hand. Two different kinds of explorative experiences are provided at the Academy.

Career Exploration provides students with a broad perspective of the economic system and career opportunities through a series of structured examinations of employer clusters. A student explores a different cluster area each quarter. A cluster is formed by three related employers; for example, the Finance Cluster includes a bank, an insurance company, and a brokerage house. The cluster areas of Communications, Finance, Government, Health, Manufacturing, Research, Sales, Utilities, Systems and Logistics were offered in the first quarter with the cooperation of thirty-two different employers. Each student spends one or two days a week at the employer location for these cluster explorations. A World of Work Seminar, conducted by the local Chamber of Commerce, provides an opportunity for students to share their cluster experiences and problems and to discuss their career plans.

Career Exploration involves a study of the world of work; Life Skills Exploration includes study of many other aspects of living. Students participate in a series of Workshops in Living conducted at the central facility. The long-range objectives of these workshops involve helping students to learn to use leisure time effectively, to assume community rights and responsibilities, to prepare for home and family life, and to relate well with others. The

instructional process involves small group activities designed to increase awareness of self and others, clarify values, develop creative problem-solving techniques and foster self-motivation.

Specialized Education. The final theme in the career education curriculum, specialized education, allows the most extensive involvement with actual career and life skills experiences and projects. This theme of the program will be implemented in the Academy during the second quarter beginning in January. The instructional design is again organized around two components: Career Specialization and Life Skills Specialization.

Career Specialization consists of two related kinds of learning experiences. The internship is an intermediate step between the rather general study of career opportunities offered in exploration and the more detailed work experience provided in a residency. The internship allows a student the opportunity to work at a selected employer location in a career area of particular interest for a relatively brief period of time. The residency is an intensive examination of a specific job in an employer setting over a more extended period of time. The internship provides rather general job related skills; the residency includes the acquisition of more sophisticated work skills. A work/study plan for each internship or residency is developed in negotiations between the students, the employer and the Academy counseling staff.

Life Skills Specialization involves students in activities termed action groups and projects. The action groups

are designed to help the student develop and apply the skills learned in life skill exploration. It focuses on an examination of selected issues in contemporary life with a special emphasis on planning and implementation of group action in response to identified problems. Students might become involved in areas such as care for the elderly, voter registration drives, ecology programs, or tutoring children with learning disabilities. The project involves the student in regular participation in the on-going work of local agencies committed to social action projects such as drug addiction rehabilitation centers, community groups, clinics, etc. Action groups and projects will usually be conducted under the auspices of public service agencies.

An important issue in developing a career education program is the extent to which the educational activities are structured. How many instructional hours should be required? Should the program be organized to meet predetermined instructional objectives or be designed to allow maximum flexibility for student choice? What curriculum materials, if any, should be structured and sequenced? In contrast to other employer-based models, RBS elected to start with a relatively tightly structured program and to introduce more flexibility over time. Thus, the present model imposes less structure than a traditional high school program but more structure than many alternative school programs.

In summary, then, a preliminary version of an employer-based career education model is now operational in a private school in Philadelphia. It consists of a number of courses

in General Education, Explorative Education and Specialized Education. The program is under continuous revision as operational experience accumulates.

Propositions

The early efforts to define and develop a model at RBS have led to certain propositions about the nature and meaning of employer-based career education. A variety of serious problems have also been encountered and many are yet unsolved. Beyond generating propositions or attempting to solve problems, a favorite pastime is speculating about the future prospects of the model under development. The latest collection of propositions, problems and prospects is reviewed in this section.

1. Career education is a complete educational program designed for students with a wide range of characteristics and interests. It is not a training program, or a vocational education program, or a program for the non-college bound. Neither is it designed for black inner-city students, or white suburban students, or students with low IQ's. Instead, career education provides a highly individualized form of education which accommodates to the needs of all students and attempts to relate their education to their future life and career.

Training is only one part of career education. The acquisition of occupational entry level skills is not the primary objective of career education. Career education provides for the acquisition of such skills, but the goal is

not to prepare every student for an entry-level job after graduation. Effective education for a career goes far beyond occupational skills to enable students to live a productive and satisfying life.

In the same vein, career education is not an additional or alternative tracking system for students. In general, three tracking systems exist in American education: academic, general and vocational. Career education is neither a fourth track nor a substitute for one of the existing three. The ultimate objective of career education is far more ambitious; it attempts to refocus the entire educational system on a career orientation.

2. Career education, even when conducted by employers, is not a radical departure from existing forms of education. The U. S. Office of Education stipulated a number of constraints on the development of an employer-based model: it must provide for the needs of all students; it must allow students to return to a traditional school setting; and it must provide for college bound students and those who intend to enter the work force. While these constraints closely reflect the mission of career education, they also force the developer to observe many of the standard educational practices such as academic crediting in terms of carnegie units, course selection with a view toward college admissions, and training programs for entry level skills. The net effect is a program which addresses many traditional content areas in unusual environments, with different kinds of instructors, and using new techniques. Thus, much of the content and many

of the procedures used in career education can be found in other educational settings. The combination of these program components into a coherent whole is the non-traditional aspect of career education.

3. The ultimate success of employer-based career education depends on changes in educational folklore, custom and law. Some examples of educational ideas and practices which are in conflict with a career education mission are:

- a. School is a building with definable space which is the locus of all meaningful learning.
- b. Students can learn only from someone who has taken educational courses and is a certified teacher.
- c. Earning a degree from a high school, college or graduate school signifies the amount and kind of education that one possesses.
- d. Academic credit must be supervised and certified by the educational bureaucracy.
- e. Outside of the educational community, there is no interest in assuming responsibility for education and very little to offer to education.

4. An employer-based approach holds enormous potential for meeting the ultimate goals of career education. A large part of education for careers involves study of the world of work and only employers can supply up-to-date and directly relevant training. Non-industrial employers, particularly public agencies and non-profit institutions, are uniquely equipped to help students learn the skills needed to use

leisure time, cope with marriage and family life, relate with others, assume community rights and responsibilities, etc. Moreover, employers of all kinds are beginning to recognize an obligation to contribute to the educational process.

The vast potential of employers for providing career education has never been fully exploited or even systematically explored. Most employers are uncertain about the role they might play in the educational process; communication between educators and employers is typically poor; administrative and legal barriers sometimes hinder close cooperation; and some employers are unable or unwilling to risk financial loss. Therefore, a central problem of the present effort is to explore the extent to which employers can contribute to education.

5. There are as many reasons for employer participation in the program as there are employers willing to participate. Some employers recognize an obligation to contribute to education; others are motivated by public relations; and still others are influenced by a strong appeal from the local Chamber of Commerce. Tax credits, financial reimbursement for expenses, the possibility of getting better trained employees, the belief that business can educate students better than schools--all play a part in the decision of some companies. It remains to be seen if any or all of these factors have sufficient holding power to sustain continued interest in the program.

Based on experience to date, RBS believes that it can recruit employers in sufficient quantity and of sufficient

quality to develop and implement an effective program. Nevertheless, the task of gaining commitment from employers has been far more difficult than originally expected. Many employers are reluctant to take the leap in view of the risk, available incentives, existing law, and established tradition and folklore. The challenge afforded by the model appears to be too much for some employers.

It appears that employers as a group are not willing or able to provide a total education experience for students at this time. Their participation and involvement in a total educational experience must be increasingly phased-in over time. Although practically all of the learning activities may eventually be located in employer settings, a central learning facility is still needed in order to complement and supplement the student's learning experiences in employer settings.

6. Career education presents an exciting opportunity for progress toward curriculum fusion and program integration. Curriculum fusion and program integration are not easily accomplished as past efforts have shown (e.g., Dewey, Core Curriculum, Team Teaching). Even so, the concept of career education implies a unifying force and direction to the entire educational process. A major priority is being given to describing and operationalizing the relationship between different domains and areas of knowledge within the context of education for careers.

Exploration may be the pivotal point for integration and direction of a student's program. In the long-range

development plans, exploration is viewed as a vehicle for fusing the largely academic learning in General Education and the vocational training elements in Specialized Education. The student might be guided through a series of career exploration experiences with his academic learning and vocational training related to the career area under study. As students crystallize their career plans, their full program might concentrate on the development of all skills which are related to their field of interest. In this sense, exploration appears to be the fulcrum of the entire program.

Another approach to the integration of a career education program is through the guidance and counseling activities. Even with curriculum fusion, a strong student personnel system is needed to schedule, manage and individualize the program according to student needs. All of the traditional student personnel functions (e.g., admissions and records, assessment, student activities, and counseling) must be reconceptualized in light of the employer-based mission. Of prime importance is an underlying rationale for counseling activities. A decision theory model seems particularly relevant since career education demands a continuous effort to develop student decision-making capabilities particularly with reference to career choice. The guidance and counseling program in career education will play a central role.

7. For some segments of the educational community, career education is viewed as a vehicle for the delivery of dollars into various coffers. Career education has quickly become a magic phrase. A great deal of publicity and

considerable sums of money are associated with career education projects throughout the country. The combination of publicity and money leads to some unfortunate consequences. Politics and pressure tactics become commonplace.

Simply put, many people want a piece of the dollar action with or without regard to what they can contribute to the effort. RBS has experienced some very subtle and not-so-subtle demands, even threats, for sub-contracts, consulting fees and purchase of supplies and materials. Hucksters of instructional materials and concepts, some school employees and officials, and some self-acclaimed community representatives are in the group that sees career education as a potential economic and power base for their own gain. It is impossible to avoid this group and difficult to confront them.

8. An employer-based model holds strong implications for contributing to public education in the future. There are many potential uses for an employer-based model. The model could be adopted by public school systems as an alternative high school for their students. This approach might benefit over-crowded school districts by decreasing the daily demand on the use of limited school facilities. The model might also be adopted in part by school districts especially as a refinement for a cooperative education program. A local school district might also consider the model as part of an urban development project. School and business facilities could be housed in a joint location with the school utilizing the business facilities and personnel as part of

their career education program and the business utilizing the school facilities for personnel training and continuing education programs.

The curriculum materials and techniques developed in the project could be used by individual schools to supplement existing instructional programs. Some examples might include new techniques for certification of student achievement and curriculum materials which integrate academic learning experiences into employer environments. Students could receive the necessary documentation of skills for access to further education with most or all of the learning taking place in non-school environments. This approach could contribute to the spread of "open learning" systems.

A basic contribution of the project with strong implications for the future is the direct involvement of employers in the planning and development of educational systems. This development may lead to greater participation in educational decision-making and to a closer relationship between societal and educational planning.

9. The design of a model of employer-based career education can be viewed as a research study, a developmental effort, or a demonstration project. The present focus is almost exclusively on the demonstration aspects of the project. The full resources of the project to date have been directed toward establishing the Academy and providing an effective program for its operation. Curriculum development, at least in the traditional sense, will not be undertaken until the Academy program is established and operating

smoothly. The sole objective of the evaluation is to suggest program improvement; formal research studies will not be conducted during the first year.

Although the intent is to emphasize curriculum development and research at later stages in the project, it may never prove possible to accomplish all of the objectives of a research, development, and demonstration project. A number of weak areas have been discovered in the curriculum model and RBS hopes to mount a long-range curriculum development effort to fill these gaps. Many important research questions will require intensive study. These activities will make serious demands on project resources which are already heavily committed to the operational program. A very careful balance of project resources is necessary in order to meet at least the major objectives of the project.

#### Summary

What, then, is employer-based career education? It involves employer participation in determining educational policy; it means that a significant part of the educational process will involve intensive study and active participation in the world of work; and it implies that most of the education process will be conducted by employers at employer locations. Above all, it is an experiment designed to examine the extent to which employers are willing and able to contribute to education.